DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 148 258 HE 009 525

TITLE Graduate Credit: Its Recognition and Transfer. A Policy Statement.
INSTITUTION Council of Graduate Schools in the U.S., Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE Jun 77
NOTE 14p.
AVAILABLE FROM The Council of Graduate Schools in the United States, One Dupont Circle, N.W., Suite 740, Washington, D.C. 20036

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrative Policy; *College Credits; Credits; Graduate Students; *Graduate Study; *Guidelines; Higher Education; *Policy Formation; Student Mobility; *Transfer Policy; Transfers

ABSTRACT

A policy statement endorsed by the Council of Graduate Schools in the U.S. is presented on the recognition and transfer of graduate credit. The statement was undertaken with the objective of broadening public understanding of both principles and practices. Institutional policies on transfer and equivalency of graduate credit may differ in detail but are almost universally based on a well-accepted set of principles. (LBH)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Council of Graduate Schools

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

ED148258

HE009525

Graduate Credit: Its Recognition and Transfer

A POLICY STATEMENT

The Council of Graduate Schools in the United States

Graduate Credit: Its Recognition and Transfer

FOREWORD

Institutional policies with respect to transfer and equivalency of graduate credit may differ in detail but they are almost universally based on a well accepted set of principles. These principles are not widely recognized and understood.

With entry of additional groups of students into graduate study and establishment of new degree and non-degree programs difficult questions are frequently asked.

The Executive Committee of the Council of Graduate Schools with the objective of broadening public understanding of both principles and practices requested a special task force to prepare an appropriate policy statement.

The members of the task force were:

David S. Sparks
University of Maryland, Chairman
Earle L. Canfield
Drake University
Mary Ann Carroll
Indiana State University
Andrew J. Hein
University of Minnesota
Robert M. Johnson
Florida State University
Arthur R. Reynolds
University of Northern Colorado

This statement is endorsed and published by the Executive Committee of the Council of Graduate Schools in the U.S.

J. Boyd Page
President

Introduction

The traditional public perception of graduate credit is straightforward and utilitarian and, understandably, does not deal with the learning conditions necessary for an experience to merit graduate credit. Graduate credit is perceived by most people as something one earns for study and experience acquired while a student in a graduate school to which one is admitted following successful completion of a baccalaureate degree program in a regionally accredited college or university. It is given for the successful completion of courses or other learning experiences such as directed research, internships, practicums or field work. Under certain conditions, it can qualify one for a graduate degree, establish eligibility for a particular level of employment or yet higher education, provide a claim to a higher place on a salary schedule, or be recognized as the basis for some other advantage or privilege. It is measured in semester or quarter credit hours, or graduate units. Its accumulation is recorded on official transcripts, and some portion of it becomes a kind of legal tender since it may be transferable from one institution to another.

In recent years there has been a growing concern for those who, traditionally, have not had access to graduate education and the benefits it bestows. One expression of that concern has been an effort to win recognition for non-traditional learning acquired either prior to, or after, admission to formal institutions of higher education. This concern has been formalized in the creation of the Commission on Non-Traditional Education and the more recent Cooperative Assessment of Experiential Learning. Both groups, with the financial assistance of the Carnegie Corporation and staff support by the Educational Testing Service, have concentrated on the evaluation of non-traditional learning at the undergraduate level, but both have expressed an interest in the possibilities of awarding graduate credit for experiential learning.

While recognizing the validity of many of the public perceptions of graduate credit, members of graduate faculties and their deans share a different understanding of the sources and nature of graduate credit. Not surprisingly they look to the qualifications of the faculty, to the qualifications of the student, and to the exchange of information,

ideas, and values that takes place between them and the environment in which that exchange takes place. They are quick to admit that much of learning is life-long, that much of it that is most useful or valuable takes place outside of institutional settings, and that society is immensely benefited by the continuing participation of its citizens in life-long education. They do believe, however, that the award of graduate credit should be limited to those forms of learning that meet certain minimum academic criteria.

Graduate Credit

A. *Criteria for Graduate Credit.* Unfortunately the term "graduate credit" is often used to describe any academic credit earned by an individual following successful completion of a baccalaureate degree program. As used here, however, the term is restricted to academic credit acceptable in partial fulfillment of requirements for an advanced degree, whether so used or not. As such it is awarded only by qualified members of faculties responsible for advanced degree programs. Such faculty members have normally earned the highest degree in the field or have its equivalent in scholarly or creative achievement. Additionally, faculty members awarding graduate credit will have recognized standing as scholars and teachers in the particular field in which credit is granted.

Students seeking graduate credit must display evidence of superior academic aptitude, achievement, and motivation. The successful completion of a baccalaureate degree program in a regionally accredited college or university at a level which gives positive evidence of capacity for advanced study is widely accepted as the minimum requirement for participation in graduate work. For students prepared in foreign universities, or in non-traditional modes, evidence of equivalent aptitude, achievement, and motivation must be presented. Aptitude and achievement are frequently documented by high scores on nationally standardized tests, such as the Graduate Record Examination, while aptitude, achievement, and motivation can frequently be determined through evaluations made by competent persons who have known potential students in comparable situations.

The exchange of information, ideas, and values that

takes place between scholar-teachers and highly qualified students, and the environment in which that exchange takes place cannot be described with great precision. Learning does and will take place in a great variety of settings and under an equally wide variety of faculty-student relationships. There are, however, some *minimum* conditions that must be met. Among them are:

1. Study at a level of complexity and generalization that reflects and extends the knowledge and intellectual maturity of an accomplished baccalaureate degree holder.
2. Study in the company of students interested and capable enough to analyze, explore, question, reconsider, and synthesize old and new knowledge and skills.
3. Study in a close and continuing contact with an experienced scholar-teacher, a member of a graduate faculty who is an expert in his or her field, in both on-campus and off-campus learning situations. The student becomes a junior colleague or an apprentice with opportunities to interact with instructors and peers in both formal and informal settings.
4. Study in a setting or settings in which library, laboratory, computer, audio-visual, performance, and field facilities are commensurate with the level of learning.
5. Study under conditions controlled by qualified graduate faculty members who are available to advise graduate students and who regularly evaluate graduate student performance in accordance with well established and published standards.

While these criteria are not exhaustive or definitive they indicate the absolute necessity for high level interaction between qualified graduate faculty and qualified students in a supportive environment as the *sine qua non* for the awarding of graduate credit.

Graduate schools will continue to recognize and grant graduate degree credit for non-traditional and experiential learning in the future, as they have in the past, when that learning meets these minimum conditions. Graduate faculty members and graduate deans have long been accustomed to offering, supervising and evaluating learning ex-

periences which are not in the usual classroom mode. Graduate study through faculty-supervised individual studies, research projects, internships, field work, practicums, theses, and dissertations has been commonplace for several decades. Moreover, the demonstration of competence in the discipline by means of the written and oral comprehensive examinations has been an integral part of graduate education since time immemorial.

Graduate faculty members should be encouraged to continue these non-classroom supervised educational opportunities. They have had many years of highly successful experience in sponsoring, supervising, and evaluating study of this type. As graduate faculty members point with pride to the flexibility in graduate programs which has developed through the years, they should maintain an open mind when considering the additional contributions which non-traditional and experiential learning can make to the graduate degree programs of the young scholars and practitioners of the future.

B. *The Academic Uses of Graduate Credit.* Because graduate credit reflects both achievement by the student and the considered judgment of highly qualified members of a graduate faculty, it is widely perceived to be both useful and valuable. Within graduate degree programs it is regularly used to measure progress toward successful completion of academic requirements. Minimum time or course requirements are normally expressed in graduate credits. The requirement for a major or area of concentration, a minor or supporting area, and the requirement that study be distributed among a group of mutually reinforcing subjects, are normally expressed in graduate credits. Graduate credit is frequently required to meet stipulations about the level of difficulty or degree of specialization expected of master's or doctoral students. Although the residence requirement is frequently expressed in terms of time it is also described exclusively in terms of graduate credits in many graduate catalogs. And, finally, graduate credit is normally used to recognize the successful completion of special degree requirements such as those for directed research, internship, artistic or creative performance, or field experiences.

Because these uses of graduate credit are widely understood by graduate faculty members and their students, the

utilization of credit within the academy has proved a versatile and efficient method of accounting. It has proved adaptable to a wide range of learning experiences, it is an effective mode of communicating the results of graduate study to both internal and external audiences, and it is difficult to counterfeit.

When, however, the generation of graduate credit becomes dependent upon novel education delivery systems, highly compressed schedules, excessive reliance on adjunct faculty, inadequate library or laboratory facilities, and administrators unfamiliar with the values and expectations of graduate faculty, the difficulties multiply and caution must be exercised.

Recognition and Transfer of Graduate Credit

A. *Recognition of Graduate Credit.* Although graduate credit bears a superficial resemblance to money there are important differences between the two. True, graduate credit, like money, is earned, can be accumulated and, within limits, can be transferred. Frequently if can also be traded for an improved salary, status, or security, either directly or after conversion into an advanced degree. And, like money, its value is subject to the market forces of supply and demand. There are, however, several significant differences between money and graduate credit. Recognition of graduate credit is dependent upon its use, the time involved, and upon student performance.

1. The recognition of graduate credit is dependent upon its use. Some course credits may be acceptable for meeting gross credit hour requirements. Others may be recognized as meeting major, minor, distribution, or level requirements. While still others can be used only in meeting specialized degree requirements for research, special skills, methodology, or field experience.
2. The recognition of graduate credit is also dependent upon time. Many individual faculty members, departments, graduate schools, or graduate deans, place time limits on the validity of graduate credit. In rapidly changing subject fields the time limit may be as short as two or three years. In more stable

fields it may be as high as eight, nine, or even ten years. Summary data from graduate catalogs indicate that time limits are being lengthened in response to the needs of an increasingly mobile and part-time student body.

3. The recognition of graduate credit is also dependent upon student performance. Graduate faculty members, and their deans, normally limit the award of graduate credit to student performance that has resulted in grades of C or better and may limit it to learning experiences in which a B or better was earned. Further, many institutions require a higher level of performance for the recognition of credits for which transfer is sought than for those earned at the institution that will grant the degree.
4. Experiential learning may be defined as learning acquired through work experiences, life experiences, service experiences, and other special accomplishments which occur outside a classroom. Because there can be no opportunity to structure the learning experience, to establish what the student must accomplish in the learning experience, to assess the amount of time devoted to the learning experienced by the student, nor to monitor the learning experience after the fact, no graduate credit should be granted for experiential learning which occurs *prior* to the student's matriculation in the graduate degree program.

   The acceptance of graduate credit for experiential learning requires particular attention to the criteria previously cited. Graduate credit should be granted for experiential learning only when a graduate faculty and dean of an accredited institution have had the opportunity to plan the experience, to establish its goals, and to monitor the time, effort and the learning that has taken place.

B. *Transfer of Graduate Credit.* The difference between graduate credit and money is even more sharply delineated when the question is one of transferability. Graduate catalogs and recent surveys of current practice indicate that limits on the transfer of graduate credit are being reduced but remain substantial.

Credit to be transferred must satisfy the graduate

school requirements and must be evaluated by faculty immediately responsible for the degree program.

1. The amount of graduate course credit that is acceptable for transfer has, by tradition, been limited to six semester hours in a master's degree program of thirty or more semester hours. However some institutions are willing to consider the transfer of nine, twelve, or even sixteen semester credit hours toward a master's degree.
2. The transfer of graduate credit is also limited by considerations of the age of the credit. The range is wide but few institutions will accept any graduate credit that is older than that submitted by non-transfer students. If credit earned more than five, six, or seven years prior to submission for a degree is unacceptable from a student already admitted to a program, then it will not be accepted for transfer from a student seeking entry into the program. The significant points are, however, whether the credits submitted for the degree represent the state of the art in the particular subject at the time the degree is awarded and whether the student has retained the knowledge involved.
3. The transfer of credit is also limited in a second way. Some institutions will accept for transfer only those credits earned following admission to their own degree programs. Occasionally they will also require that advance permission be sought for courses to be subsequently transferred into a program.

   Other institutions, however, will accept any transfer credits completed before admission provided they are applicable to the degree being sought. Once again, the decision should be based upon the conditions stated in 1 and 2 above. Blanket transfer is not appropriate.
4. The transfer of graduate credit is also generally limited to certain types of learning experiences characterized by the foregoing criteria. Only rarely will a graduate faculty or dean grant transfer credit for a correspondence course, or travel not directly related to a particular course or research project. And some graduate educational credits earned in courses or ex-

periences offered under the auspices of proprietary schools, business or industrial training programs, or schools conducted by the Department of Defense, Department of Agriculture, the National Institutes of Health, or the National Laboratories or professional associations traditionally have not been transferable.

The Future

There is little doubt that the pressures to recognize and transfer graduate credit will continue. The work of opening additional opportunities for graduate education to minorities, women, and older students has only begun. Proponents of academic credit for experiential learning and study completed in non-traditional locations are certain to urge further broadening of our definitions of graduate credit and additional opportunities for transfer. The extended degree programs already in place and the prospect of graduate degrees being offered under the auspices of the external degree institutions will generate similar pressures.

The response to such pressures, and the changed needs of society which they reflect, must come largely from individual graduate schools, their faculties, and their deans. Decisions on graduate credit in these and other innovative areas will require sensitivity and understanding, in addition to the continuing commitment to high quality graduate education. We believe that adherence to the minimum criteria outlined above will prove helpful to present and prospective students as well as to graduate faculty members and their deans.